



St Vincent de Paul Society
NSW *good works*

SUMMER 2023
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Vision



**TOWARDS A NEW
STRATEGIC PLAN**

**HOUSING STRESS
ACROSS THE STATE**

**MEMBERS
MAKING A MARK**

**CELEBRATING
A CENTURY
OF SHOPS**



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



We are coming to the end of a difficult, but successful year.

In the face of innumerable challenges for the Australian community and world at large, the generosity of spirit exemplified by our community of Vincentians continues to shine through brightly.

As we approach the Christmas season, I am reminded of the resolute kindness which endures throughout difficult times, especially when I see our members, volunteers and staff act with such compassion and encouragement towards those less fortunate.

Our members were among the first to offer support to those impacted by floods, distributing funds and lending a compassionate shoulder for affected people to lean on.

With the money raised from our fundraising efforts, we've been able to make a difference to those without a home.

And from the dedication of our volunteers, we've been able to celebrate the success of 100 years of Vinnies Shops.

We have celebrated some truly inspirational moments, which have brought people together not just through words, or ideas, but through action. I am proud to bring you this issue of *Vision* where you can learn more about how our Society continues to make a difference in a variety of ways.

I'm incredibly proud of what our members, staff and volunteers have achieved this year and look forward to all that awaits in 2023. What lays ahead remains unknown, but we can place our trust in the certainty that we will be there extending a hand-up to all who fall upon times of need.

Paul Burton
State President, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

CEO'S MESSAGE



As we approach Christmas and the end of the year, I am struck by the success of the St Vincent de Paul Society in NSW in recent times.

I mean this both in terms of our expansive ability to provide help to people who need it and significant milestones we have, collectively, achieved.

While the Society is and always will be a member-led charity, everyone including members, volunteers, and employees have pulled together in a way that has enhanced the work of any one of those groups.

The administration and logistics support from employees during the Northern Rivers floods, for example, helped members be there to support their communities with much-needed cash grants almost immediately in the disaster's wake.

This year, too, we celebrated 100 years of Vinnies Shops.

Without the inventiveness of members starting and carrying them forward through the decades or our always reliable – even in a pandemic – volunteers, they never would have been so long-lived.

Our dedicated retail and logistics teams have, of course, played significant parts as well.

Hearing Regional Presidents like Pat Cudmore and Sue Vit thank employees for their help in re-establishing conferences and drawing new members into the fold at a first-of-its-kind conference in October was equally satisfying.

On their own, these examples of our people from across the organisation enhancing and supporting the mission of the Society are something to be cherished.

But collectively, they point to the dedication of each and every one of us in pursuing the same goals and ensuring that no work of charity is foreign to the Society.

Jack de Groot
Chief Executive Officer, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW

Growing towards the future

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW is in the process of developing a new Strategic Plan to guide the Society's future response to current and emerging social challenges.

Our current Strategic Plan concludes in June 2023, having been extended by 12 months to enable delivery of actions disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The upcoming strategy will commence in July 2023, and it will reflect our aspiration to deliver more impact for the people we assist, to adapt to the specific challenges we face and to equip the organisation to best meet community needs.

"The people we assist will always be at the centre of what we do and supporting our members and frontline volunteers and employees to deliver assistance is always front of mind," said Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

"As the world changes, we must also adapt to ensure that we reach people where they are and that they feel safe when they reach out for assistance.

"For those of us not in frontline assistance work, it is our job to support the people delivering that care so they can concentrate on the job at hand.

"As a Society, we have been confronted by extraordinary challenges in the form of bushfires, pandemic and floods. These moments of upheaval show us what is possible through necessity; we have the capacity to adapt, change and, most importantly, grow."

To inform the development of the Strategic Plan, we have analysed the external environment to identify areas of emerging and growing need. Earlier this year, a Senior Leaders Forum took the opportunity to discuss a shared vision for our future work to respond to growing need.

We have conducted consultations in all regions, with members, volunteers and staff, seeking input to the strategy development and to better understand local needs. These consultations have been supplemented with surveys of our people, the people we assist and our supporters to seek views about priority areas of work, the focus of our services, our strengths and weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Consultations are designed to ensure that our work continues to be informed by the people we assist and the voices of those who support the Society in its work.

"In undertaking this consultation process, we hope that all our people feel represented in the vision of the Society going forward," Jack said.

Early findings from the consultation sessions have identified external demands that will increase the need for the services we provide, a desire to increase our connection within communities and the willingness to strengthen our internal capabilities to better understand and deliver impact. Other elements identified as important to us during strategy sessions include evolving consistent systems and processes for all our people, actively influencing social policy through advocacy and better reflecting the diversity of the communities in which we work.

"To everyone who has engaged in the consultation process up to this point, I extend my thanks," Jack said.

"The St Vincent de Paul Society has done remarkable work for decades and will continue to do so for years to come."





Celebrations a century in the making

Celebrations were held across the state to commemorate 100 Years of Vinnies Shops in NSW.

To mark the momentous occasion, events were held in Armidale, Belmont North, Bondi Beach, Brookvale, Casino, Dubbo, Paddington, Parkes, Picton, Newtown, Springwood, Sutherland, and Wagga Wagga, along with a grand re-opening following refurbishments at Newtown – the site of the very first Vinnies Shop opened in 1922 – attended by Jenny Leong MP, Member for Newtown, and leaders of the Society.

“Vinnies Shops are an institution in Australia where people can discover a treasure and give it a second life,” said Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

The community were able to get involved in the festivities through a campaign offering customers the opportunity to discover 100 exclusive treasures at featured shops.

Treasures included clothing, accessories, and homewares from brands including Alex and Trahanas, Bassike, Blanca, Double Rainbouu, Dylan Kain, Ellery, Furla, Henne, Jac + Jack, Jets, Kathmandu, Lee Mathews, Matteau, Mulberry, Mulberry x Acne Studios, Reliquia, Sarah Jane Clarke, Seafolly, Shona Joy, plus many more who donated a generous amount of brand-new goods.

Customers who made a purchase from any Vinnies Shop during the centenary celebrations went in the draw to win a vintage Chanel handbag, valued at \$5,000, and a DeLonghi La Specialista Arte coffee machine.

Vinnies Shops play a vital role in enabling the good works of the Society. Sales from shops go directly to funding programs and services which assist people with food, clothing, crisis accommodation, emergency response, healthcare, education, financial aid and much more.

“We have Vinnies Shops in 227 locations throughout NSW which rely strongly on the generosity and goodwill

of volunteers who give of their time to support the community,” said Jack.

“A lot has changed over the past 100 years but the core of Vinnies Shops remains the same in giving items a second life and using the sales to help people who fall on hard times.”

From humble beginnings to standing as one of the most recognised brands in the Australian retail market, the story of Vinnies Shops is one of charity, enterprise and renewal. Happy birthday, Vinnies!

Where your donations go

If you’ve ever made a donation at a Vinnies Shop or clothing bin you might have wondered about the processes it goes through before ending up for sale to raise money for our services.

Some clothes go straight on the rack, others are collected by our logistics team. The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has a small army of people who can transport whatever is needed. Every day, they collect and deliver donated goods to one of our distribution centres, like the one at Auburn in Sydney.

At the distribution centre, donated goods are sorted into different categories like men’s shirts, women’s skirts, and so on, and packaged into boxes of similar items.

Vinnies Shops place orders for different sorts of clothing and other goods they require and our distribution team is called on once again to supply them.

Alternatively, some clothing is taken directly to services like the Matthew Talbot Hostel homelessness service for men or the Marian Centre domestic violence shelter.

At the shops, the clothes go through another round of sorting, this time by staff and volunteers, before the items are placed on the shop floor, ready for sale.



Recovery and recommendations after the floods

More than six months on from the worst floods to ever hit the Northern Rivers, the St Vincent de Paul Society remains present in the community to offer support.

In excess of \$3.8 million in financial and material assistance has been distributed to over 6,000 people in the months since the Vinnies NSW Flood Appeal was launched in early March.

The Society was the first major charity to provide cash grants in the days immediately following the floods at seven evacuation centres located throughout the region.

During the current phase of recovery and rebuilding, our members on the ground have been providing ongoing assistance with food, water, clothing and emotional support.

Thanks to the generosity of corporate partners including Amazon, Ezy Charge, Work Wear and BP, we have also distributed generators, tents, sleeping bags, towels and fuel cards to assist people during the lengthy recovery stage.

At present, many people impacted by the floods remain in unstable housing situations due to the damage sustained and a shortage of tradespeople based in the area with the capacity to undertake the necessary work.

Due to the prohibitive cost of insurance for households in the area, approximately three quarters (74%) of people seeking assistance from the Society were uninsured, while a fifth were only partially insured.

The Society was one of nearly 1,500 individuals and organisations to make a submission to the NSW Flood Inquiry examining the causes, preparedness, response and recovery to the unprecedented floods.

Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director – Flood Response, and Joy Kyriacou, Manager – Volunteer and Member Programs, appeared before a Select Committee into the flood response in June to expand upon the Society's submission.

"Our recommendations would be for us to be able to have a faster, more co-ordinated approach, that we should have plans in play for us to move forward, that we can move swiftly but also mindfully for how we are supporting people with financial support but also [disorder] and also looking at that preparedness," said Ms Van Doorn before the Select Committee.

The NSW Government supported six of the 28 recommendations from the final report and supported, in principle, the remaining 22 recommendations pending further consultation.

Key recommendations for the inquiry included, reshaping Resilience NSW to Recovery NSW, establishing a NSW Reconstruction Authority, and greater emphasis on affordable housing in the Northern Rivers.

With many of the people hardest hit by the floods forced to live in lower-lying areas of Lismore and surrounding communities due to the prohibitive cost of housing located on higher ground, the Society reaffirmed its call for greater investment in housing that offers people security and stability.

"The floods rendered more homes uninhabitable than the Black Summer bushfires and directly impacted on people already experiencing homelessness or living in insecure housing," said Jack de Groot, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO.

"They also compounded an already existing housing crisis – leaving more people in need of housing and, potentially, lengthening the amount of time spent waiting for social housing."

"Housing is scarce and expensive and cost is a significant factor in what has driven people to living in homes that are at high risk of damage from floods," said Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President.

The Society will continue to work alongside flood-affected communities in the months ahead.

Rebuilding after the Lismore flood

We spoke to Renata in the immediate wake of the flooding of Lismore. Half a year on, she and her son are living in a caravan in their front yard while their home is cleaned out and rebuilt.

"The longer we go with this project, mentally, it's just harder and harder.

"You have to pick up more days of work because you're running out of money and because you've got more days at work, you don't have enough time to keep the project going.

"Live our whole lives as well as project manage a whole house being built and then, on the weekends, I'm trying to paint the house and do the things that I can do myself.

"So, it's constantly every second that you wake up you hit the ground running until you go to bed," Renata says.

Renata was one of thousands of people the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW assisted with direct emergency financial payments.

"The funds came through very timely, the next day or the day after," Renata says.

"And it was literally for accommodation, we stayed in an Airbnb for a couple of nights until we could get ourselves sorted.

"Certainly, petrol and groceries and it was very much needed for the immediate day-to-day, so we could acclimatise and figure out what we were going to do.

"Things were very expensive right at the beginning.

"Without that money right there and then, you're just not dealing with those things," Renata says.

With so much damage in and around Lismore, getting access to goods and services needed to rebuild has been slow going.

"We have the one power point in the house and I've got an extension lead from the one power point out to the caravan so we're fortunate to have power in there now, which has certainly changed things.

"And the fridge and whatnot, not having to get gas bottles going so that was a huge improvement for us.

"The builders came about mid-April, they came through the Resilience Lismore connections," Renata says.

"At this stage, we have a bath in situ and a toilet in situ but not really much else in those two rooms.

"No kitchen at all.



"We're starting to paint the very first room," Renata says.

"My builders have been working on five or seven other houses in between, while they're doing mine.

"So, they're really spreading themselves thin trying to accommodate as many people as they can.

"They're hoping that sometime in October, they can have enough of a handover that we could start putting in power," Renata says.

It's not just the damage to the buildings that has left its mark on Lismore.

"The whole town felt acutely the rain on the weekend.

"They were traumatised, my builders felt traumatised, the people at work feel traumatised.

"It's either the sound of the rain coming down or, in my case, seeing the earth fill up with water and that slipping in the mud – that feeling of sliding in the mud, I just can't take that anymore," Renata says.

Renata is hoping to move back into her home by Christmas.

The Society walks with First Nations peoples in support of the Uluru Statement

At this year's NAIDOC Week event, aptly titled *Get Up!, Stand Up! Show Up!*, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW CEO and President unveiled a copy of the Uluru Statement from the Heart they had co-signed with the Chair of the Board.

Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State President, encouraged everyone to read the Uluru Statement and take its message to heart. The Uluru Statement invites non-Indigenous Australians to walk together with First Nations peoples towards a better future. It was developed by over 250 First Nations delegates in 2017, following a large and deliberative grassroots engagement process across Australia.

The leadership's support for the Uluru Statement is part of the Society's ongoing commitment to reconciliation. It reflects our mission to shape a more just and compassionate society. By supporting the Uluru Statement and a Voice, we are supporting First Nations peoples who have suffered greatly as a result of colonisation.

First Nations peoples comprise around one-fifth of the people that the Society works with and assists. By supporting the Uluru Statement and a Voice to Parliament, we will help to reduce poverty and injustice experienced by First Nations peoples. The Catholic Church officially endorsed the Uluru Statement at the Fifth Plenary Council in July 2022.

The Uluru Statement calls for real and practical change through the establishment of a First Nations Voice to Parliament enshrined in the Constitution. A First Nations Voice to Parliament is consistent with the Society's vision to encourage people to take control of their own destiny. The Statement also calls for a Makarrata Commission to be set up to undertake processes of treaty-making and truth-telling. This agenda is represented in calls for *Voice, Treaty, Truth*.

At the end of July, the Federal Government released the draft referendum question on enshrining a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution. The proposed question is: "Do you support an alteration to the constitution that establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice?" The Government has committed to hold a referendum in its first parliamentary term, with the Prime Minister asking all Australians, "If not now, when?".

In preparation for the forthcoming referendum, the Social Justice Team is developing resources to support our members, volunteers and staff to better understand and take action in support of the Uluru Statement and a First Nations Voice. You can read our fact sheets about the Uluru Statement, why the Society supports it, and our Social Justice Statement, *Joining the Struggle for Recognition*, online at www.vinnies.org.au.

We invite you to join us in a movement of the Australian people, based on our values of compassion, understanding and respect.



IT'S TIME for a First Nations Voice to Parliament protected by the Constitution.

UluruStatement.org

Regional leaders, far and wide, unite

Vincentians from across the state united for a day of leadership and recognition as part of the inaugural Regional President's Forum held at Mary MacKillop Place over the October long weekend.

Conceived by Paul Burton, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council President, the event sought to recognise the important contribution of Regional Presidents in managing and supporting the work of members.

In his opening remarks, he told the room, "Trust is the foundation of leadership. It is character that makes trust possible. And in turn, trust makes leadership possible."

CEO, Jack de Groot spoke of the merits of the One Society approach.

He emphasised that the collaboration of members, volunteers, and employees does not change the mission or values of the Society.

He pointed to the essential virtues in the Rule: simplicity, humility, gentleness, selflessness, and zeal.

"These things are not up for change," he said.

Jann Browne, Tamworth Regional Council President; Pat Cudmore Sutherland Regional Council President; and Sue Vit, St George Regional Council President, spoke about their experience in growing membership in their areas.

In Tamworth, the St Louise Care and Support Conference needed to be rebuilt from the ground up.

"This is the sole care and support conference for the region.

So, you can imagine the loss by the community and how devastated we felt that this conference had virtually just broken down," Jann said.

She spoke about doing letterbox drops, speaking after mass (and the challenges of keeping parishioners there long enough to hear), and other ways to encourage people to join.

Pat spoke about help she received from Society employee and Manager of Member and Community Engagement, Janice Stokes, in setting up an information night for prospective members.

"From that evening, I can happily say we now have established a new conference with eight enthusiastic and – dare I say – younger members."

Sue thanked Executive Director of Membership, Volunteers and Regional Operations, Sam Crosby, for his help in re-establishing conferences in her area.

"I have to say thank you to Sam for supporting me last Sunday and we have got Rockdale Conference back after, probably, 10 or 15 years."

Brian McCarney, Cudgegong Regional Council President, spoke about his role in the Social Justice Network.

Speaking of the success of the recent Build Homes Build Hope campaign to collect over 15,000 signatures to trigger a debate in NSW Parliament on the need to build more social housing.

"It meant that ministers and MPs sought to focus on the issue in front of their colleagues," he said.

The gathering also heard from:

- Joy Kyriacou, Manager of Member and Volunteer programs, about the Vinnies No Interest Loans Scheme
- Rob Cohen, the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW's Aboriginal Engagement Partner, about ongoing progress on the Society's reconciliation action plan
- Phil Coyte, Director of Retail and Logistics, on the future of Vinnies Shops
- Belinda-Jayne Davis, Safeguarding Coordinator, on safeguarding children
- CEO of Amelie Housing, Brian Murnane, on the benefits to the Society of having members', volunteers', and employees' expertise to draw on



“This is bigger than us” – the state of Housing Stress

Kellie* has called Byron Bay home her entire life.

Getting by with work at a local supermarket before a turn of ill health left her unable to perform her job, Kellie turned to the St Vincent de Paul Society for assistance following a six-week wait to access support from Centrelink

Receiving \$680 per fortnight in income support, by the time her weekly rent of \$300 is accounted for, she is left with a meagre \$80 to last 14 days.

What's more, her 'home' is a converted garage.

Continuing to receive assistance from conference members with food and fuel to attend specialist medical appointments – Kellie was temporarily able to pick up a few shifts at a local club before her health issues worsened – her situation is distressingly all too familiar.

“If she is unable to work, how does she survive – and how long will it be before her rent goes up,” asks Gail Gaudron, St Vincent de Paul Society Lismore Central Council President.

Over 34,000 people sought assistance from members of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW in the past year. More than half were experiencing chronic housing stress.

The Society has long held the position that everyone – irrespective of circumstances – needs a secure, safe, stable and affordable place to call home.

This belief is borne out in the assistance our people provide in communities across the state every day.

Across NSW, 55% of the people we assist experience housing stress. In the Metropolitan, North West, South and West regions just over 50% of people are affected by housing stress. However, in the North East, spanning the Lismore and Maitland / Newcastle Central Councils, the cost of housing is most profoundly felt with 63% of people spending upwards of 30% of their income on the essential need of having a roof over their head.

With the North East copping a barrage through bushfires, COVID-19, and, most recently, floods, the prohibitive cost of rents and shortage of properties overall has led to the mythologised Australian Dream fast becoming a fantasy for a growing number of people.

“These are coastal areas, so there already was housing stress because of the holidaying side of it,” says Clare Van Doorn, St Vincent de Paul Society North East Regional Director.

“You put a big flood in place and you've got all these people displaced – and they're still displaced six months after the fact – even the natural cycle of rentals becoming available, we're not seeing that at all because all the displaced people are still over there.”

Where, previously, housing stress was primarily limited to metropolitan areas, the trend of people moving to regional areas means that the issue is being felt across the board.

“When COVID came, people wanted to get out of the cities, they've come and purchased up a lot of the properties, pushing property prices and rents up because they can work from home now and fly to and from Sydney,” says Gail.

“A house in Lismore – just out of where the recent flood was – is going for one million. It's not brand new.”



Gail Gaudron



Brian Halligan and Clare Van Doorn

St Vincent de Paul Society members have shown tireless commitment in assisting people facing complex housing situations which have been exacerbated by the pandemic and floods.

Members are able to assist with immediate relief in the form of food vouchers and parcels, while in response to the surging demand experienced on the ground the amount of assistance for transport expenses, such as fuel and car repairs, has increased.

Furthermore, drop-in services, providing cleaning facilities and meals, operated by the Society throughout the north coast in Coffs Harbour, Ballina and Tweed Heads have experienced a 36% increase in service usage over the past financial year as a result of the growing number of people left to fend with no fixed address.

In spite of housing prices easing slightly in recent months, the soaring cost of rents – which show no signs of slowing down for some time – has led to a growing number of people reaching out for help.

Consequently, stories of people facing homelessness in cars, camping in tents and unsustainable stays in motels – all of which offer restricted stability and result in poorer health outcomes – are going from outliers to trends.

While Clare and Gail see the scope of the crisis beyond the Society's individual capacity to resolve, targeted policy measures designed to improve material conditions such as increasing the rate of income support payments and building more social and affordable housing would make definite differences to people experiencing hardship.

At a time when reports of record property prices are presented in an aspirational light, the cost of failing to ensure everyone has access to the fundamental need of housing has created an environment where, from one day to the next, people are unsure what the future holds.

"This is every day for what we do and the people we support," says Clare.

Regions with Housing Stress above 60%

REGIONAL COUNCIL	REGION	CENTRAL COUNCIL
Orara	North East	Lismore
Port Stephens	North East	Maitland/ Newcastle
Lower Hunter	North East	Maitland/ Newcastle
Hastings	North East	Lismore
Tweed/Byron	North East	Lismore
Blue Mountains	Metropolitan	Greater Western Sydney
Manning	North East	Maitland/ Newcastle
Eastlakes	North East	Maitland/ Newcastle
Cudgegong	North West	Bathurst
Clarence	North East	Lismore
Wyong	Metropolitan	Broken Bay
Namoi Barwon	North West	Armidale
South West	South	Wagga Wagga
North Eastern	North West	Armidale
Broken Hill	West	Wilcannia/ Forbes

Figures are sourced from Power BI Conference data provided by St Vincent de Paul Society members.

**Name changed for privacy reasons.*

Housing Stress: a person is considered to be in housing stress if they spend upwards of 30% of their gross income on housing.

Zoe's story goes from 'strength to strength' with Songbirds

Songbirds is a program delivered at the Ozanam Learning Centre where participants, like Zoe, are able to tell their stories through song writing.

Many people experienced a downturn in productivity during the last COVID-enforced lockdown.

In Zoe's case, she found an outlet that took her passion for writing from strength to strength.

Making the most of her time in lockdown to put lyrics to tracks using the Rap Fame app on her phone, Zoe has been able to turn her raw demos into a fully realised hip hop track with the support of the staff at the Ozanam Learning Centre.

"If you listen to the Rap Fame app version, it's just a jazz sample repeated three times – lyrics to some nice beats," Zoe explains.

"Then we came in here [to the studio] and made it a beautiful hip hop track."

Drawing on her interests in jazz, blues, rap and hip hop to create 'Honeypie', Zoe is one of the artists featured as part of 'Music Plays You', an album of original music written and recorded by members of the Ozanam Learning Centre community.

"I've always written... poetry, journal entries, quotes."

"I think I've come to a really good time where my poetry is paying off and I can now put melody to it, and, with assistance, put music to it, which is fantastic.

Aspiring to return to study in order to become a teacher's aide, Zoe is continuing to write and find connection at the Ozanam Learning Centre through a shared love of music.

"I think it's great here – they are delivering such good services – it's really fulfilling."

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, in partnership with the Community Restorative Centre, has released 'Music Plays You', an album of original music written and recorded by members of the Ozanam Learning Centre community as part of the Songbirds program.

'Music Plays You' is available to stream / purchase on Bandcamp at: www.olcsongbirds.bandcamp.com/releases



Music at the OLC

Songbirds is one of several programs overseen by Omar Abidin, activities coordinator at the Ozanam Learning Centre, allowing people to engage with music.

"Here at the Ozanam Learning Centre we endeavour to provide programs to engage people, primarily interested in building social inclusion, and particularly trying to also educate people who have a particular interest in music," explains Omar.

"We have tried to create a bit of a pathway and are continuing with those programs beginning with simple soft entry programs, such as ukulele classes and singing classes for people with a lower skill base, and then transitioning through to more skill-based programs such as ensemble classes.

"We're so lucky to be able to provide these types of services, the resources we have here are second to none. It's our hope that the work we do here empowers people to further their opportunity and their quality of life."



Speak up for Social Housing

The Society continues to call on the NSW Government to invest in more social housing leading up to the 2023 State Election.

With the availability and affordability of housing across the state leaving a growing number of people without a place to call home, members of the St Vincent de Paul Society Social Justice Network are encouraging people to send handwritten letters highlighting the importance of everyone having access to a home to call their own.

The letter-writing campaign was launched at the Society's Social Justice Forum last May where members, staff and supporters from across the state shared their personal reasons for participating in the campaign.

Each letter is intended to express a personal perspective on the importance of social housing and why more is needed.

One such letter was penned by Sister Carmel Hanson, Maitland / Newcastle Social Justice Representative, who drew upon her experience living alongside men, women and children facing homelessness at the House of Hospitality refuge in Newcastle for the past 30 years.

"Never, in all that time, have I experienced the sense of hopelessness and indeed despair among our residents as they search for rental accommodation," write Sr Hanson.

"Indeed, when the House first opened in 1991, any parent with a child received a Department of Housing Unit within one month. Now the wait is at least 15 years."

Sending handwritten letters is one of several actions the Society has taken in raising awareness of social housing in recent years as part of its larger 'Build Homes, Build Hope' campaign.

Following a successful tabling of a petition, containing 15,000 signatures, which was debated in NSW Parliament in 2021, the Society commissioned research conducted by the University of New South Wales Centre for Social Impact which found that government investment to build 5,000 new social housing properties each year for the next decade would reduce the current waitlist by 75%.

At present, the current social housing waitlist is made up of approximately 50,000 applicants, meaning a significant investment in social housing, as proposed by our research, would cut the waitlist to just over 13,500 applicants by 2031.

The Society also operates 12 housing complexes throughout the state providing 502 homes for people as part of an arrangement with the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing Fund (SAHF). Residents are placed into secure housing and offered tailored wraparound support as part of the SAHF model in an effort to help people connect with the local community and achieve their goals.

To be part of the campaign calling for more social housing, contact Rhiannon Cook and the Social Justice Team at social.justice@vinnies.org.au for more information and resources to make your voice heard.

OUR CALL TO ACTION

We are calling for people to send handwritten letters calling on the NSW Government to build more social housing leading up to the State Election on 25 March next year.

Each letter sent as part of the campaign should call on the NSW Government to build 5,000 new social housing properties each year, every year over the next ten years. This call is consistent with other social service providers and advocacy organisations, as well as being informed by research conducted by the University of New South Wales Centre for Social Impact.

Thriving Together in the Shoalhaven

Vincentians from across the Shoalhaven attended the Thrive Together Fair, an outreach event hosted by Shoalhaven City Council connecting people doing it tough with local services and support.

Taking place at the Bomaderry Sport Centre in early August, the event was attended by more than 300 people with 75 diverse community organisations hosting stalls on the day.

Some of the supports available to attendees included health checks and referrals to health appointments, advice on how to apply for government rebates and vouchers, legal advice, information on seniors and disability government and non-government services, and education and employment assistance services.

People doing it tough were also able to access free food, showers and washing machine facilities, as well as haircuts offered by the local TAFE.

St Vincent de Paul Society was well represented with a stall from John Purcell House, the Nowra Conference, and the Vinnies Bushfire Recovery and Community Development Programs in the Shoalhaven.

Events like the Thrive Together Fair play a vital role in allowing the Society to reach vulnerable people facing hardship and disadvantage.



Griffith serves up Sacred Hearty Meals

Members from the Sacred Heart Conference in Griffith have been cooking up a storm in the kitchen.

As part of a collaboration with the Griffith Community Centre, members from the Conference have prepared hearty, nutritious meals for locals in need along with expanding assistance through education.

In September, Yvonne Cooper, Sacred Heart Conference President; and Lisa Whillans, Wagga Wagga Regional Client Support Officer, launched fortnightly cooking classes led by local chef Bryan Curran to give people the skills to prepare a family meal on a budget, using a dish that can be used on a stovetop and in the oven.

People taking part in the program were presented with the dish and recipes from each of the four sessions to use at home upon completion of the program.

There has been strong demand for assistance from Sacred Heart Conference over the past year with 153 people reaching out in times of need. More than two-thirds identified needing help with food as a result of the rising cost of living and housing affordability in the region.

Providing cooking classes is one way the Society endeavours to assist through a hand-up so that people feel empowered and encouraged to take control of their lives.

From little things, good works grow

Bringing up close to five decades of service as a member and president of the Lindfield conference, Eric Atkins has called time on his tenure with the Society, retiring at the age of 92.

"It's added a bit more purpose to my life," Eric reflects. Growing up in Dungog – 'the capital of the Hunter Valley' – Eric left home at 16 to work with the NSW Forestry Commission. Spending 42 years in the public service, including time as chief of the administration division of the Forestry Commission of NSW, work and family led him to Lindfield in the north of Sydney.

Purchasing a property in 1965, where he and his wife raised six children, Eric continues to reside in the same home to this day.

First becoming involved with the Society in 1972 following a call for members from the altar at mass, Eric's early visitations left an indelible impression of the disadvantage occurring within his community.

"It showed me the other side of life that there were people going hungry. There were people in need, even in a place like Lindfield, which is a reasonably affluent suburb (or supposed to be)."

Going on to take on a role as treasurer a year later before becoming conference president in 1996 – a position he acted in for more than two decades – he received an Apostolic Blessing in 2014 from Pope Francis in recognition of decades of service.

"That was a very high honour that I received. It was presented to me by the local Parish priest at a Mass one day; it came as a bit of a surprise actually, I didn't realise it was happening. People further up the line at the Chatswood region organised it. It was a very proud moment."

Having worked alongside Eric for many years, Bradley Jones, current Lindfield-Killara Conference President, regards him as a 'stalwart' epitomising the Vincentian ethos.



"His commitment to service of the poor has been an inspiration to many, me included. His retirement is truly well earned."

Making the decision to retire from Society duties in his older age and to allow a new approach to take place, Eric's hope is for more people to take up the cause of the Society.

"I sometimes think there's a lot of people in society, particularly people when they retire, [who] should give a little bit more attention to provide assistance to those who are not as well off as they are," says Eric.

"There's plenty of people around who don't know where their next meal's coming from; just do something to help those less fortunate than themselves."

Maitland / Newcastle commission new Central Council President

A ceremony was held to commission Brian Halligan as Maitland / Newcastle Central Council President during a Sunday morning Parish Mass at St Francis Xavier's Church, Belmont, in June.

The Mass was attended by many representatives of the Society from across the region, as well as Paul Burton, State President; Leo Tucker, Executive Director – Mission and Spirituality; Greg Ryan, Mission, Spirituality and Pastoral Care Partner; and Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director – North East.

Following his Homily, during which he spoke highly of the Society and its good works, parish priest, Fr Gerard Mackie, conducted the commissioning ceremony assisted by Leo Tucker. The congregation joined with Fr Gerard in acknowledging and congratulating Brian on his commissioning to this important role within the Society.

Following Mass, all present were invited to partake in an enjoyable morning tea in the adjoining church hall and members and guests were joined by interested parishioners.



RECONCILIATION IN WILCANNIA / FORBES

Wilcannia / Forbes Central Council members and volunteers have been holding events during NAIDOC Week and National Reconciliation Week, to celebrate the mounting of the Acknowledgement of Country plaques in Society premises.

Over 40 people from various groups and organisations came together to acknowledge the traditional lands of the Wiradjuri people in Forbes.

Members of local First Nations groups have been involved in consultations and making recommendations, along with representatives from the local schools, local council and other support agencies for the events.

The Reconciliation Action Plan is aimed at improving social and economic outcomes in order to make a difference in the lives of the people the Society engages with, employs or assists.

Aunty Aileen, traditional custodian of the land, was at Forbes to deliver a Welcome to Country and spoke of the historical harm committed against Aboriginal people in the local area, and how the plaque ceremony was a healing step in bringing the community together.

Attendees then joined together for further discussions over light refreshments and to establish and develop relationships. These events have been held in Forbes, Parkes, Hay, Cobar, and Barham with more being planned across the West Region.

The Forbes Vinnies Shop was the first in the Wilcannia / Forbes Central Council to mount an acknowledgement plaque to recognise the heritage and the ongoing connections of the Wiradjuri traditional custodians.

The Society has recently created the Bulbulwul Baya Advisory Group and First Nations Employee Network as a part of the greater vision for reconciliation.

The human cost of high prices



Through our Christmas Appeal, we are highlighting the pressures faced by Kelly, one of thousands of people turning to the Society due to the rising cost of living.

"...with everything going up, we just can't keep up... It gives me so much anxiety – it's crippling,"

Surging inflation and interest rates are creating severe cost of living pressures on those who can least afford it - people who are already vulnerable.

Kelly and her family have been doing it tough following COVID-19 lockdowns and now, economic pressures are adding to her already desperate situation.

"The bills have now gone up so much.

"We're doing everything we can from not using lights, taking the shortest possible showers, eating only pasta because it's cheap, but nothing ever seems to be enough," she says.

The cost of housing, food, energy, and petrol have seen some of the sharpest inflationary pressures and there's only so much you can do to cut back on the necessities of life.

This is what sets this moment in time apart from previous periods of high inflation – the fact that so many of the sharpest increases are on things people can't do without.

"My husband works. My eldest daughter works. But, with everything going up, we just can't keep up.

"It gives me so much anxiety – it's crippling," Kelly says.

Kelly's husband works in the hospitality industry and lost his job due to the pandemic.

He was rehired as a kitchenhand but is now earning a lot less money.

The cost of rent for Kelly and her husband exceeds more than half of their combined income, placing them in acute housing stress.

More than half of people who approach the St Vincent de

Paul Society NSW are experiencing housing stress.

Housing stress is defined as a household which spends more than 30% of its income – before taxes – on housing.

This leaves very little left over to manage other bills and expenses.

"When our electricity bill came in, I dropped. I literally dropped.

"There's just no way we could pay it," Kelly says.

"The roof is leaking, and it's destroyed our microwave.

"We can't afford to fix it, and we can't afford to replace the microwave.

"What do we do?"

"I get so much anxiety.

"There's always another bill.

"There's always something to be fixed, or things we need, like clothes."

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW has provided the family with assistance, including rent, utilities, food and school expenses, as well as bedding for Kelly's daughters.

"To get some help, it really changes everything.

"I just started seeing a counsellor thanks to Vinnies," Kelly says.

At this point, we have likely not seen either the peak of inflation or interest rates, so costs are only set to increase the closer we get to Christmas.

For many families like Kelly's, who are already struggling, things are likely to get worse before they get better.

Please share the word of the Vinnies Christmas Appeal to ensure that we can continue supporting people like Kelly in their time of need.

You can make a donation to the Vinnies Christmas Appeal at www.vinnies.org.au or calling 13 18 12.

St Leo's step up

We are so fortunate to have the support of a vibrant and generous school community whose fundraising efforts range from bake sales and mufti days through to school sleepouts and Winter Appeals. We would like to take a moment to recognise the incredible contribution of one such school – St Leo's Catholic College in Wahroonga.

The last two years have been challenging for schools, with restrictions impacting teachers, students and families. Despite this, the school community at St Leo's has held two consecutive Vinnies School Sleepouts, each raising close to \$20,000. They held an additional fundraiser in November with those funds going to support the Matthew Talbot Clinic.

In total, St Leo's has raised upwards of \$42,000 over the last two years and we are so grateful to them for this

generosity. As remarkable as their fundraising is, the advocacy and awareness that these events promote within the school group is also very important. One student stated:

"I chose to sleepout to experience what hundreds of thousands of people in Australia are going through every night. It shows that we haven't forgotten them, and we can raise money and awareness in the process."

Participating students also called for greater government support for those struggling with the increasing cost of living and a reduction in the growing numbers of homelessness in our communities.

If you know of a school that would like to get involved and fundraise in support of Vinnies, they can learn more here - fundraise.vinniesnsw.org.au or by contacting our Events and Community Fundraising Team – events@vinnies.org.au.



Thank You Event 2022

This September, after years of COVID cancellations, we were delighted to hold our 2022 Vinnies Thank You Event (sponsored by the Hilton, Sydney).

For the first time in two years, we welcomed some of the Society's most dedicated and loyal supporters, from corporate sponsors and Vinnies CEO Sleepout fundraisers through to foundations and major donors and those leaving gifts in wills. They joined us for an evening of canapes and reflection on the projects and services that their support has helped fund.

Richard Stewart (Chair of the Board) and Yolanda Saiz (Director of Commercial Enterprise, Fundraising and Communications) welcomed our guests and recapped some of the incredible outcomes the Society has delivered over the last year. We were fortunate to be joined by a person assisted by the Society, who shared some of his experience of homelessness and how we were able to assist him.



As we reflect on the way that the pandemic has changed life over the last few years, it's clear that it has not stifled the generous support and good will of our donors and sponsors.

We look forward to continuing work with these sponsors and welcoming new supporters over the coming years.

Corporate Partners leave a lasting legacy

The support of our family of corporate partners continues to make a difference to the lives of thousands of people in need each year.

The Society is grateful for all the generous displays of assistance, especially by Johnson & Johnson, who have worked alongside us for 30 years.

IGA Christmas Appeal

IGA has supported the Society each Christmas since 2012 by raising funds to assist people in need. Once again, IGA will support our good works by running a Christmas Appeal campaign with customers able to purchase a \$2 Christmas Bauble and specially marked Community Chest products at participating IGA supermarkets in November and December. Proceeds raised nationally will be used to support families and individuals struggling to keep a roof over their heads due to cost of living pressures.



Amazon

Amazon Australia is teaming up with the Society for a third year and providing more than 1,000 students experiencing disadvantage across the country with the essentials they need to succeed in 2023.

We are so grateful for Amazon Australia's support in equipping students with backpacks, stationery, lunchboxes, water bottles, notebooks, and more.

Dooleys Support

DOOLEYS Lidcombe Catholic Club have generously supported the Sydney Night Patrol for many years, and this year we are delighted to have DOOLEYS on board to help fund the new Cumberland Night Patrol Van. The significant contribution by DOOLEYS will go towards the purchase of the inaugural Cumberland Night Patrol Van and assist with operational costs.

The Cumberland Night Patrol Van will service and provide food and essential items to people experiencing homelessness and disadvantage within the Cumberland Local Government Area. This will also provide DOOLEYS employees the opportunity to engage with the service and the people we assist by volunteering on the Van.



Johnson & Johnson

This year marks a momentous milestone with the Johnson & Johnson Family of Companies (Johnson & Johnson) bringing up 30 years of giving back to the community as our longest-serving corporate partner.

Initially supporting our good works with donations to the Winter and Christmas Appeals, Johnson & Johnson's involvement with the Society has grown to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness, families facing disadvantage and poverty, and women escaping domestic violence.

"We form long-term community partnerships, with like-minded organisations to collaborate on addressing health and well-being inequities in our communities," said Kris Ashpole, Global Community Impact Lead – Johnson & Johnson (Australia & New Zealand).

"Our partnership with Vinnies involves financial contributions, gifts-in-kind, advocacy and a range of employee engagement opportunities for fundraising and volunteering."

Some of the key initiatives developed as a result of Johnson & Johnson's support include V4You, a program designed to assist children and young people and their families experiencing homelessness. After a successful implementation at Vincentian House in Sydney, the V4You framework has been expanded to other services across the state to encourage positive engagement with education and connections with family and the community.

As part of the latest agreement between the Society and Johnson & Johnson, the Vinnies NSW First Nations Traineeship and Development program aims to increase First Nations representation in staff and leadership roles, along with other measures to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

In total, Johnson & Johnson have contributed more than \$2.1 million to the Society over the lifetime of the partnership.

We look forward to working closely with Johnson & Johnson in the years to come and thank them for their generosity and commitment over the past three decades.

Community Sleepout Success Story

On the 18th and 19th of August, the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout held its fifth annual event to raise funds and awareness for homelessness and services operated by the Society. Nearly 400 community members came together after the pandemic in-person and virtually before braving the night in their backyard, couch or car to raise awareness for the changing face of homelessness.

Funds raised on the night remain in local communities and enable the work of member-led conferences and specialist services in Albury, Armidale, Central Coast, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Hunter, Maitland, Murrumbidgee, Southern Highlands, Tenterfield, Tweed Heads, Wagga Wagga, and Western Sydney.

The Fred's Place event in Tweed Heads achieved remarkable results with local schools participating in fundraising, along with the Mayor and Councillors from Tweed Shire Council. A panel discussion, featuring Headspace and Momentum Collective, spoke on the

night about the cost of living issues facing the region and the importance of greater assistance for people doing it tough. This all culminated in a standout figure of \$86,720 – doubling the initial goal.

Some of the services to benefit from the funds raised include Edel Quinn in Wagga Wagga and Freeman House in Armidale, along with enabling local conferences, Care and Support Centres and Community Hubs to continue assisting people facing hardship and disadvantage with household bills, food, clothing, and other support.

Thanks to the fundraising and efforts of our participants, donors, supporters, and sponsors, we were able to record a total of \$274,616 which will make a huge difference to people in need.



Connor and Nanny sleepout in Bathurst

In addition to participants who slept out in-person and virtually as part of the NSW Vinnies Community Sleepout, a team of two achieved a remarkable result in the north west.

Undeterred by the formal cancellation of the event in Bathurst, 10-year-old Connor Klower slept out with Marina Gray, his nan and Evans Regional Council President, to raise an impressive total of \$5,000.

"I want to do it because my nan inspired me – to be able to help people in need so they can have a better home,"



Connor told the *Western Advocate* prior to sleeping out. Driven to raise vital funds to enable programs run by the St Vincent de Paul Conferences in the Bathurst region, Connor's fundraising endeavours saw him call for donations at a local shopping centre, churches, and online through social media, which garnered support from figures including NSW Deputy Premier, Paul Toole. Bedding down for the night on the veranda of Marina's property at Billywillinga when wet weather made sleeping out in a paddock untenable, the experience of sleeping out helped Connor gain newfound empathy for the circumstances faced by those doing it tough across the state.

"I explained that when someone doesn't have a home, they have no place to sleep, eat, or to permanently keep their belongings," Marina told the *Western Advocate* post-event.

"Not everyone has enough money to own or rent a home, because these things are very expensive.

"They might not be able to work right now, or maybe their job doesn't pay them enough money for them to afford a house.

"He has a better understanding."



Help at any stage is **valuable**

So much has changed in Megan's life since receiving help from the St Vincent de Paul Society.

"Had you asked me a couple of years ago, do I see myself stopping using drugs and having a normal life, I probably would've said 'no chance' because I simply didn't know how."

Currently staying at a transitional accommodation service operated by the Society in Inner Western Sydney, Megan has been able to work her way back following periods of addiction, homelessness, and incarceration.

"When I came out of jail, I essentially stepped out into nothing. I had one plastic bag of clothes and myself," Megan recalls.

"Initially it was very exciting... the jubilation of that carried me from Parramatta to Central. But when I got to Central, where I used to live, and realised that there was no home, no possessions – nothing – it really hit me hard."

Spending several weeks sleeping rough before being connected with the Society and placed into a women's refuge, the support of a case worker led to a stay at a rehabilitation service where Megan was able to address the issues facing her.

"I never intentionally thought of killing myself; I undoubtedly definitely thought, 'I wish I could just not

carry on living,' because... it's such a dead end feeling. It's such a complete dead end, 'where do you go from here?' kind of feeling.

Moving into a subsequent refuge before taking up her current residence in transitional housing, Megan recognises the transformative impact services like those operated by the Society can have in people's times of need.

"The last two years of my life, specifically the time that I've been living here at transitional accommodation, has turned out to be a really pivotal time in my life.

"I didn't seek help for long periods of time because I thought I could handle it because I wanted to fix it myself.

"The important thing is that whenever a person is asking for help, it's important that they're able to be identified, directed and connected with services.

"The services have to be there. The availability of services, funding for services, that people know about services, and that when people are in difficult places someone is able to help identify either they themselves or someone else says, 'Listen, you're in a tough spot.'

"Help at any stage is valuable."

Our door is always open

When someone reaches out for help, not sure where to turn in a time of crisis, the mentality of the Vinnies Assist team reassures that there is no wrong door.

Lissa Votano, who manages Vinnies Assist, says the program's approach means that once someone is connected with the service, they will always be given what they need, whether it is information, support, access to internal or external services and, most importantly, that they are never turned away.

"We're the voice of Vinnies – when people call in, we get information of what they need and refer them in the right direction within the Society or refer them on externally if we don't have the resources or capacity," explains Lissa.

The Vinnies Assist line was initiated in 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic upending traditional access points for people in need. Instead of responding ad hoc to people in need of assistance, the Vinnies Assist line formalised the needs of people across the state with trained triage staff on the other end. It acts as the centralised point of contact for members and volunteers responding to people in crisis, an information hub, and a key resource for continued support.

As a result of this centralised system, anyone seeking assistance is met with a greater level of understanding when they access support in a time of need. Vinnies Assist aims to bridge the gap for members, volunteers, staff and the general public requiring up to date

information and guidance to support the people we assist. Some examples of the type of help Vinnies Assist provides include support for members and conferences over the phone, immediate referral to welfare services, and access to crisis accommodation and support for people seeking assistance.

The service, which responded to 125,000 calls during the past financial year, has been instrumental in supporting conference members in accessing guidance and assistance in instances of domestic and family violence, especially in regional areas where there is a lack of available community services. By working in collaboration with the Vinnies Assist team, members have been able to find safe, temporary accommodation for women and children displaced by domestic violence.

Plans are afoot to expand the Vinnies Assist service by linking internal resources across all directorates of the Society.

Members are encouraged to get involved with Vinnies Assist, with plans in a stage of infancy to create a position similar to social justice representatives and spiritual advisors for members from each Central Council to collaborate directly with the service.

If there is one message Lissa wants to impart it's that, "There is nothing Vinnies Assist can't help with."

To reach Vinnies Assist, phone 13 18 12 press option 5, email vinnies@vinnies.org.au for general information or Intake.Officer@vinnies.org.au to make a referral to our Vinnies Services or Member support services.

To learn more about Vinnies Assist, including collaborating with the service, contact lissa.votano@vinnies.org.au





The impact of support

Vinnies Services is pleased to announce that our Alcohol and Other Drug Services (AOD Services) have achieved re-accreditation against the QIC Health & Community Standards in August 2022.

For the Society, accreditation indicates to the people we assist, our members, and stakeholders that we are committed to continuously improving our organisation, our people and the services and programs we provide.

It also means we get to hear independent feedback on our services from the people we assist, our partners and front-line staff, via the external auditors.

We are privileged to receive genuine, positive feedback particularly with reference to the wonderful care, support, and joy that we bring to the lives of the people we assist. We have captured a summary of the feedback made by the people we assist in our AOD services during the audit:

- "They have really helped, of all the places I have been to this is the one only that has helped, the only one I have connected with."
- "I loved it, I found it was really good for me."
- "They make me feel really welcome."
- "I would be lost without them, they are a brilliant service."
- "It changed my life; I am looking forward to getting up each day."

We are always inspired by our stakeholders and staff to constantly seek improvement in everything we do. We have captured a summary of the feedback made by our stakeholders and staff about our AOD services during the audit:

- "I really appreciate what Vinnies is doing for my clients."
- "The managers I work with, I have so much confidence in them and they make my job easier."
- "I am most proud of working with someone in their recovery journey."
- "I like seeing clients grow."
- "We work with people wherever they are at."

The St Vincent de Paul Society has embarked on a quality journey where continuous quality improvements require constant evaluation to ensure we maintain excellence in service delivery. The successful accreditation processes could not be achieved without the work of the service leaders, frontline staff and volunteers, the organisational leadership teams and support functions. Together, they ensure that the Society is striving for the highest quality of service to the people we assist.

In the 2021/22 financial year, 1,240 people received treatment for Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) through services and the Continuing and Coordinated Care Program with an average period of support per patient of 141 days.

The main reasons for referral to our AOD services were problematic drug use and mental health. The Continuing and Coordinated Care Program supported 481 people with local assistance administered in Central and Eastern Sydney, Hunter / New England and Central Coast, Murrumbidgee, Nepean and Blue Mountains, South East NSW, South Western Sydney, and Western Sydney.



Towards a more equitable and sustainable future: Rosalie Rendu Forum 2022

The impacts of climate change are being felt in real-time and with real consequences.

Harrowing scenes of never-before-seen flooding arrived earlier this year at the same time communities were still recovering and rebuilding from the catastrophic Black Summer bushfires.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identified Australia as a country ill-prepared to cope with climate impacts, now and going forward, without intervention. The IPCC recommended Australia aim to reduce emissions by 75% below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2030.

As extreme weather events occur more frequently and with greater intensity, the 2022 Rosalie Rendu Forum highlighted *Climate Justice: working together for a more equitable and sustainable future*.

Taking place during Anti-Poverty Week, the annual event, named in recognition of Sister Rosalie Rendu, saw an acclaimed group of women discuss the impacts of climate change on communities

The event was held online with viewings held at Society offices around the state.

Following a Welcome to Country from Yvonne Weldon, Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council, in recognition of the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation, and a spiritual reflection from Jacinta McGrath on the history of Sister Rosalie Rendu, host Saimi Jeong (Sydney

Alliance) spoke on the impacts of climate change exacerbating existing inequality before introducing a panel of four expert speakers.

Professor Anne Poelina, Chair of Indigenous Studies and Senior Research Fellow at Nulungu Institute, University of Notre Dame; Dr Kim Loo, NSW and ACT Chair of Doctors for the Environment Australia; Kellie Caught, Program Director (Climate and Energy) – Australian Council of Social Services; and Suzanne Nichols, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW St Carthage’s Conference President, Lismore Central Council made up the esteemed panel.

Issues raised during the course of the 90-minute discussion included the relationship between society and the environment, environmental impacts on health, the impacts of climate change on disadvantaged communities, the response of St Vincent de Paul Society members in disaster-affected areas, the tension present between the economy, people and the environment, and government policies that need to be enacted to address the issue.

Insights from the night:

“Indigenous people have learnt to live in relationship with nature. The land is alive – it has agency – we engage it with deep respect.” – Professor Anne Poelina

“People experiencing poverty and disadvantage are being left worse off and [climate impacts] can drive people into poverty. [We need to be] putting people with the least at the front and centre of these policies.” – Kellie Caught

“People who are already depriving themselves of energy are trying even further – taking fewer showers, going to bed earlier – I’m seeing my patients having to choose between turning on the air conditioning or paying for their drugs. People are living in precarity.” – Dr Kim Loo

“People who [were] struggling to keep their families going lived in the cheaper areas in the [Lismore] CBD. Those people were immediately displaced, they lost their connection and network.” – Suzanne Nichols

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW would like to thank Professor Poelina, Dr Loo, Ms Caught, Ms Nichols, Ms Jeong, Ms Weldon, Ms McGrath and the Social Justice Team for their involvement in another tremendous Rosalie Rendu Forum.

To view the 2022 Rosalie Rendu Forum, contact social.justice@vinnies.org.au to access a recording of the event.

The St Vincent de Paul Society stands alongside communities impacted by climate-related disasters including floods, bushfires and drought. Learn more about our disaster relief and recovery efforts at our website: www.vinnies.org.au



Modern Slavery Statement Launched

Modern slavery refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of power, or deception.

Over 40 million people are enslaved in the world today. In Australia, it is estimated that around 15,000 people are enslaved, with the additional risk that procurement through international supply chains exposed to slavery adds to the global suffering.

NSW Society State President, Paul Burton, launched the Society's *Modern Slavery Statement* at an online Workshop early in the new financial year, which was hosted by the Social Justice Team and the Modern Slavery Working Group.

"Under the *Modern Slavery Act 2018*, we are required to assess and prevent the risk of modern slavery in our operations and supply chains. So, this *Modern Slavery Statement* is part of those obligations," he said.

"But this endeavour is not just about meeting legislated obligations. It goes much deeper!

"Our underlying concern for the women, children and men trapped in slavery is generated by our commitment to protect the sacredness of life, to defend the God-given dignity of each person, and to show a unique concern for the most vulnerable.

"This special concern – or 'preferential option for the poor' – is foundational to the Society of St Vincent de Paul and all our good works... We are called to seek out and find those in need," Mr Burton said.

To read the *2021 Modern Slavery Statement*, visit www.vinnies.org.au/modernslavery

Vote for housing this election

Ensuring everyone has a safe, secure and stable place to call home will be at the forefront of the St Vincent de Paul Society's campaign platform ahead of the NSW State Election.



As voters prepare to cast their ballots at the polls on Saturday 25 March, the Society is striving to ensure all parties and candidates make housing a key issue given the magnitude of the issue across the state.

Central to this campaign will be three key priority areas:

- Ensuring our housing system delivers on the right to a home
- Protecting renters through fairer tenancy laws
- Funding Specialist Homelessness Services

The rationale behind these specific priority areas is to ensure people can live securely in housing, support is available in times of hardship and underlying issues that contribute to housing stress are remedied.

Our election statement, entitled *Housing Justice: A home for everyone*, has been distributed to conferences. Additional copies are available online and upon request through the Social Justice Team. Supporting resources, including electorate fact sheets and briefs detailing each of the priority areas in greater depth, will also be made available.

The Society will hold multiple briefing events early in the new year to provide more information on the *Housing Justice: A home for everyone* platform to empower members and supporters to engage with their communities and candidates on the issues raised.

Members can also get involved by writing letters to MPs and candidates, participating in community forums, organising to meet with candidates to discuss the platform, and much more.

To learn more about the *Housing Justice: A home for everyone* platform and the NSW State Election, contact the Social Justice Team at: social.justice@vinnies.org.au.



Ask a busy person...

Despite the area's pastoral wealth and the presence of a major university, the City of Armidale has considerable social disadvantage. Kerry Steller moved here in 1981, teaching at O'Connor Catholic College and getting involved with the St Vincent de Paul Society, which left her with strong memories.

They include former residents of Freeman House, the Society's Special Works service providing residential and community-based programs for adults experiencing drug and alcohol addiction along with men's homelessness.

"I remember some of these folk working through their issues and later returning to join our St Augustine's Conference where they could reach out to other people in need," Kerry recalls.

"Coming back to join was amazing."

Another standout is the Taiwanese nursing student at the University of New England.

"She boarded with us for a while and came along to our English literacy classes at the Ozanam Learning Centre. Most of the attendees were from the refugee Yazidi community from Iraq.

"This girl knew nothing about Vinnies or even Christianity, but when she saw the work we were doing, she joined up and helped us out. It was wonderful to see how the experience affected her."

Kerry Steller is the President of the Armidale Regional Council, and secretary of St Augustine's Conference, closely linked to Freeman House, founded by local Vincentian Don Hewitt who was honoured by the Vatican and in 2022 received an OAM.

She was raised on the land near Canowindra, schooled in Sydney, completed a Bachelor of Science degree (geology and geophysics) at The University of Sydney, and a DipEd at UNE after moving to Armidale.

Now retired, Kerry retains close links with O'Connor Catholic College where many students are Vinnies supporters and fundraisers. She has arranged visitations to nursing homes and many excursions to Sydney where students visited St Canice's church close to Kings Cross which assists many homeless people.

Activities for Freeman House residents include weekly coffee and cake afternoons, cooking, music, bowling, childcare, and bush walks where staff and Conference members join companions, male and female, aged from their 20s to 60s.

The 'Fresh Start' program, a recipient of community sleepout funds, focuses on personal welfare such as dental and eye health, community involvement with varied outings, and arranging furniture storage for people who had to vacate accommodation.

"These practical measures have tangible outcomes," Kerry says, "Including a role in helping reunite people with family members they thought they'd lost forever."

Another innovation is a 'family conference' pilot that sees parents and their children visiting an individual or family once a month to discuss their needs and concerns. Each Vinnies family has access to a mentor who can assist with the practicalities such as food if need be.

At the other end of the age spectrum the local conferences are working on ways of bringing back older Vincentians who moved away from Society work because of the COVID-19 requirements.

Kerry Steller works with the parish and the Catholic Schools office, is a member of Zonta and has a long commitment to the Armidale Tree Group that regenerates bushfire-affected land and helps to restore koala habitat. Then there are her three grandchildren and of course seven SVDP conferences.

Her phone's ringing constantly ...

"I'd better go," Kerry says, and who would dare stand in her way?



Vale Tony Corkeron

In very sad news, the Society has lost one of its most dedicated, long-standing, and influential members with the passing of Tony Corkeron.

The Society extend its condolences to Tony's family, friends, and everyone whose lives he touched through his efforts.

Tony had been dealing with illness for a long time but it did not deter him from contributing to the work of his conference and the Society more broadly.

As former Sydney Archdiocese Central Council President, Tony Cranney, put it: "Tony died with his boots on as President of the Georges Hall Conference."

Tony Corkeron's time with the Society spanned more than 60 years, beginning in Goulburn before he made significant contributions at Summer Hill, Bass Hill, and Georges Hall.

During that time, he also held many senior positions within the Society.

With his business background, Tony is remembered by former State Council President, Denis Walsh, as being a source of great help to both him and his predecessor, the late Ray Reynolds, during their terms.

"Tony was a great asset to the financial stability of the Society and he was involved in the Society's successful bid to win a tender under the NSW Government's Social and Affordable Housing program."

The Society's contribution to that program resulted in 502 social and affordable housing units being built where more than 750 people now live.

Tony was a loving husband, father, and grandfather and leaves behind a large family.

He was also loved and respected by his fellow Vincentians for his leadership, generosity, intelligence, faith, and love of the Society's mission of putting that faith into action.

His funeral was held on Tuesday 19 July at St Mary Queen of Heaven Church in Georges Hall.

Man of the People

Well-known St Vincent de Paul Society volunteer Ian Wray from Dubbo has been among the outstanding individuals chosen to be recognised as part of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards. He has taken home the 2022 Orana Senior Volunteer of the Year for his efforts within the Society and beyond.

After a life of working for his own business, Ian found himself retired at 66 and itching for something to do. Wanting to continue working with the community, Ian began volunteering for the Society through the local St Brigid's Parish.

Now into his seventh year with the Society, Ian has taken up multiple responsibilities to help keep the show running.

"My main work is Care and Support which is identifying what we can do to assist the people who come to us," says Ian.

"I run the food pantry as well and I look after the furniture and accommodation for domestic violence survivors. It all comes through Vinnies."

Ian is no stranger to wearing different hats, "I enjoy it! Well, I'd go mad if I wasn't doing a 12-hour day!"

Ian finds time to volunteer as a bus driver for a nursing home and run the communion service every Sunday for the St Brigid's Parish. He has served for various organisations throughout his life, including the Dubbo Rescue Squad and has worked as an honorary ambulance officer.

Ian hopes to inspire a new generation to get involved in the community through volunteering, "Whatever group you choose to work for, you're working at the ground level with people who really need help. It's a really big step for those people to come through our doors and ask for help."

"I walk away and smile sometimes and think 'Gee, I really made a difference to that person's life.'"



Metro schools make a hand-up possible

The Vinnies Metropolitan Schools and Youth Team continue to be overwhelmed with joy at the support shown by schools across the Sydney region this past year. With many individuals and families across NSW still feeling the pinch of the pandemic and rising cost of living, the efforts from schools have been greatly welcomed and appreciated.

Primary and secondary schools across the region have demonstrated tremendous generosity of spirit through their contributions towards major appeals held in connection to natural disasters, Lent, Winter, and Christmas. In addition to this, many schools have also supplied financial and material donations on ad hoc or regular bases to support the good works of the Society, such as the Metropolitan Vinnies Van Services, Matthew Talbot Hostel, Vinnies Support Centres and member-based Conferences.



During the first two-thirds of 2022, an inspiring 148 schools across Sydney donated to the Society in a monetary or material capacity. Through their participation in initiatives such as fundraisers, sleepouts and donation drives, schools across the region have enabled the Society to offer a hand-up of support to those who need it most.

It is so inspiring to see the next generation putting faith into action. We are so grateful to all schools who have supported the Society this year, your heartening generosity is deeply appreciated!



Busking for Vinnies in Parramatta Centenary Square

Parramatta lunchtime musical performances are back after a COVID-enforced hiatus, much to the delight of the Metropolitan Vinnies Schools Engagement Team and the City of Parramatta Council. Thanks to co-ordination from long-time Society volunteer, John Neylon, school students are once again showcasing their musical talents in support of the Vinnies Winter Appeal in the heart of Sydney's fast-growing second CBD.

The students spent three days 'helping Vinnies help those in need' by rallying office workers, construction crews, interested locals and passers-by to contribute to the Society's efforts to address homelessness in Western Sydney. Information about support services was distributed by the Society's Metropolitan Schools Engagement Team and members from the Winston Hills Conference.

Parramatta's Centenary Square was filled with the animated strains of all genres of song to support the Society's outreach. Everyone got stuck into the festivities, students shook donation buckets, musicians and choir singers buzzed with excitement and even impromptu dancing broke out in the square, making the performances a real highlight of the year. Andrew Charlton (Federal MP for Parramatta) himself got involved when he dropped in to donate and learn more about the Vinnies Winter Appeal.

Generous funding from the City of Parramatta Council allows the Society to organise school groups. This initiative has built on the previous Vinnies Western Sydney Annual Doorknock Appeal and the original efforts of students from Our Lady of Mercy College (Parramatta). This year, the team was joined by Mount Saint Benedict College (Pennant Hills) and Oakhill College (Castle Hill). The combined efforts of all schools raised \$4,391 for the Busking for Vinnies Appeal.



Vinnies Shops Wear It Purple and ask R U OK?

Vinnies Shops have embraced diversity, inclusion and wellbeing in recognition of Wear it Purple and R U OK? Day.

Volunteers got into the spirit of the days by wearing purple and yellow respectively, along with arranging shop displays in accordance with the theme colours.

Wear it Purple Day is an annual Australian day of awareness showing support to all LGBTQIA+ young people and their right to be proud of who they are. It is an opportunity to celebrate and support diversity in young people from the LGBTQIA+ community by promoting safety and inclusivity within schools, universities, workplaces and communities.

R U OK? Day is a National Day of Action reminding all Australians that every day is the day to ask, 'Are you OK?' and start a meaningful conversation whenever they spot the signs that someone might be struggling with life.

Vinnies Shops are often the first point of contact the community has with the Society which is why it is vital that all people feel welcome and accepted.

The Society is committed to building and supporting a diverse and inclusive environment for all Vinnies members, volunteers, employees and people we assist. The Society's vision is to build a more just and compassionate society for all people; events such as *Wear It Purple* and *R U OK?* play an important part in living out our aspiration.

To learn more about Wear It Purple, visit: www.wearitpurple.org

To learn more about R U OK?, visit: www.ruok.org.au

Memories made in Vinnies Shops

As part of the 100 Years of Vinnies Shops celebrations taking place throughout 2022, volunteers have shared their fond memories of supporting the Society's good works.

Maria has volunteered at the Vinnies Shop in Armidale for more than two decades.

Beginning as a sorter, processing donations out the back of the former shop, she can finally see the lighter side of a story from her time serving customers on the till.

"There was a [volunteer] who was using a walking stick, but she didn't use it in the shop," reminisces Maria.

"One day somebody came – and we sold it!

"When she finished work, she was looking for it; we said, 'Oh gosh, we sold it!'

"Luckily there was another in the shop and we gave it to her.

"It sounds funny now, but at the time!"

At the heart of Vinnies Shops is a mission to raise vital funds to support services and programs run by the Society which assist people in times of hardship.

Our shops have experienced a lot of changes over the past century, as fellow long-serving Armidale volunteer Lenore can attest.

"[There's] an enormous improvement in the layout and the quality in the way everything is presented," says Lenore.

"It was fairly rough back when I started, I don't think anybody had really thought of the layout beyond if there was an empty space, you filled it.

"The new one is extremely well organised – by organising the shop, it has helped drive sales and in turn provided funds for the Society to help people."

The St Vincent de Paul Society NSW extends a show of gratitude to all our volunteers who give tirelessly to ensure the running of our shops.

Vale Stanley Roy Fogarty

Benefactor honours Matthew Talbot Hostel

Stanley Roy Fogarty, one of our most outstanding benefactors of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW in recent times, sought no praise for his planned generosity during the latter years of his life.

Mr Fogarty, who passed on 25 January 2020 at the age of 90, grew up in Sydney's eastern suburbs and was schooled in Coogee. Drawn to the sea, he was a keen and expert sailor of small craft, and later in life became skilled at small engineering projects that he came to develop professionally.

He also became an expert investor and was active on the stock market, although his light was always 'hidden under a bushel'.

Living in Oyster Bay, he ran a successful manufacturing business based in a factory and warehouse at Condell Park.

Known as a self-contained and humble person, Stanley Fogarty continued to work well into later life. He neither married nor had children or any known siblings.



Prior to his death the Society was unaware of his intention to provide financial support for our good works. To our great surprise, we learned that Mr Fogarty had gifted half of his Estate to the Matthew Talbot Hostel for homeless men in Sydney.

We are given to understand that Mr Fogarty felt passionately about the problems of alcohol abuse, homelessness, and family abuse.

Stanley Roy Fogarty sought no personal recognition in life. He will be fondly remembered for his humility, hard work and extraordinary support for one of the Society's most important programs. His name will be entered into our "Book of Gratitude" and his memory cherished by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW.

Honorary Solicitor Service

You too can leave a lasting legacy by including a gift to the Society in your will.

Maintaining a valid and legal will is of vital importance in managing your personal affairs, creating peace of mind and ensuring your final wishes are respected.

To assist our supporters with this process, a number of our solicitor supporters, located throughout the state, have generously accepted invitations to become



Honorary Solicitors of the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW. As a result, benefactors who decide to leave a gift in will provision to the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW can access solicitors in their area, free of charge, who will write a simple will or a codicil to an existing will.

We would be delighted to welcome you into our benefactors group, *Vinnies Forever Friends*, and extend invitations to our special events throughout the year and visits to our services.

If you would like to take advantage of this free will service please contact Cherie McKenna, Gifts in Wills & Estates Manager, via phone or email on:

Phone: (02) 8622 0387

Email: cherie.mckenna@vinnies.org.au



The Visitation

A brief reading from the gospel of Luke... "For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leapt for joy..."

As we lead into Advent and the time of Christmas, the birth of the Christ-child, a reflection on the first moments of Mary's journey is important to ponder. The Visitation was a kairos moment where Mary, with Child, makes a hard journey into the hill country of Judea to be with her older cousin, Elizabeth, to assist her in the final stage of her pregnancy giving birth to her son John. Elizabeth's pregnancy, like Mary's, was beyond the realms of probability so they had much to share.

In the Society, I have heard it said that the grassroots of the works of the Society is home visitations. It is a time where the Vincentian visits the home of those they serve and comes to understand the environment, culture, social life, and situations of those seeking need. Frederic Ozanam expressed this: *"Knowledge of the poor and needy is...visiting the slums where they live, sitting by the bedside of the dying, feeling the cold they feel and learning from their lips the causes of their woes."*

Today, home visitations have become challenging for many reasons. On occasions, Vincentians meet people outside of the home, in hubs or parish rooms, or welfare offices in the back of retail shops. So, have we lost our grassroots approach to compassionate care?

Two aspects of the visitation may assist our reflection for I sense that Elizabeth offered visitation to Mary as much, if not more, than Mary did for Elizabeth.

Firstly, is Elizabeth's joy at seeing face to face her

younger cousin. We may not always perceive this joyful moment when we have a visitation moment to offer assistance, but I remember perceiving a sense of joy in relief and simply being listened to, especially during the recent floods in Lismore. People knew that they could merely come to us, and we were there in "visitation" for them. They could pause and feel a deep sense of dignity given to them, we listened to their story, and offered our hearts in hospitality. This visitation is the grassroots of our pastoral and compassionate care. This "visitation" needs to be nurtured as our way to serving divinity or the sacred in the poor.

The other is that when Mary visited her cousin, she had only just learnt of her own pregnancy outside of a married union. There would have been disbelief, rumours and accusations of infidelity to her betrothed. But in the arms of her cousin, celebrating the gift that each carried, it seemed that she was fully accepted, without any form of judgement and fully celebrated, understood, and loved.

The Vincentian Rule reminds us that our service is without judgement and that in reverence Vincentians serve, "listening to them, respecting their needs and recover dignity".

Through the insights of the Visitation, I believe the well-known anthem of the Rule of "No work of charity is foreign to the Society", is given a deeper meaning. These charitable works are not purely transactions of a duty but visitations of hope, fundamental to the core of our Vincentian spirit.

**THE
COST-OF-LIVING
CRISIS**

**IS HURTING
MANY FAMILIES.**



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Please give in store, visit vinnies.org.au,
call **13 18 12** or scan the **QR code**.



Vinnies Christmas Appeal



St Vincent de Paul Society
good works